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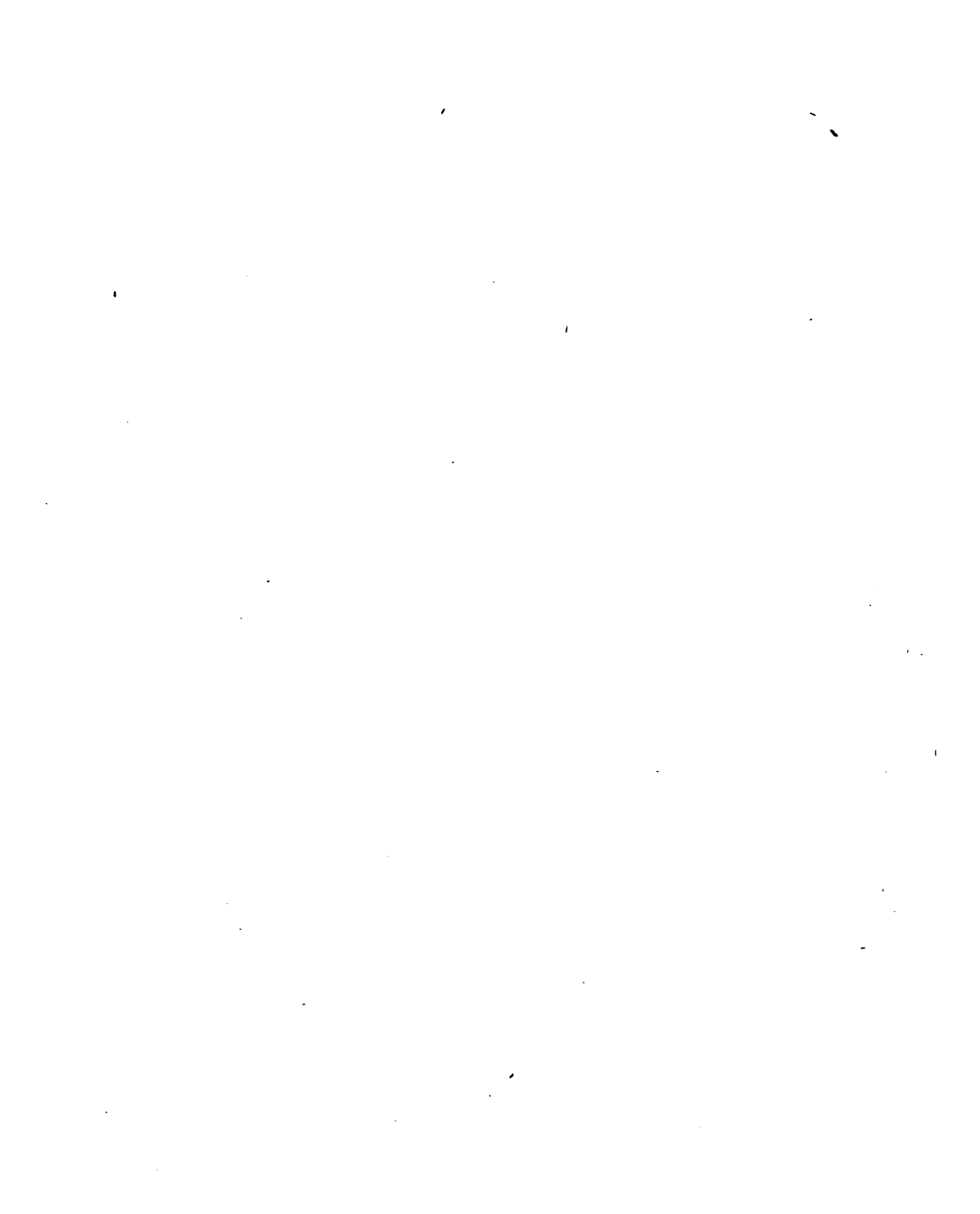
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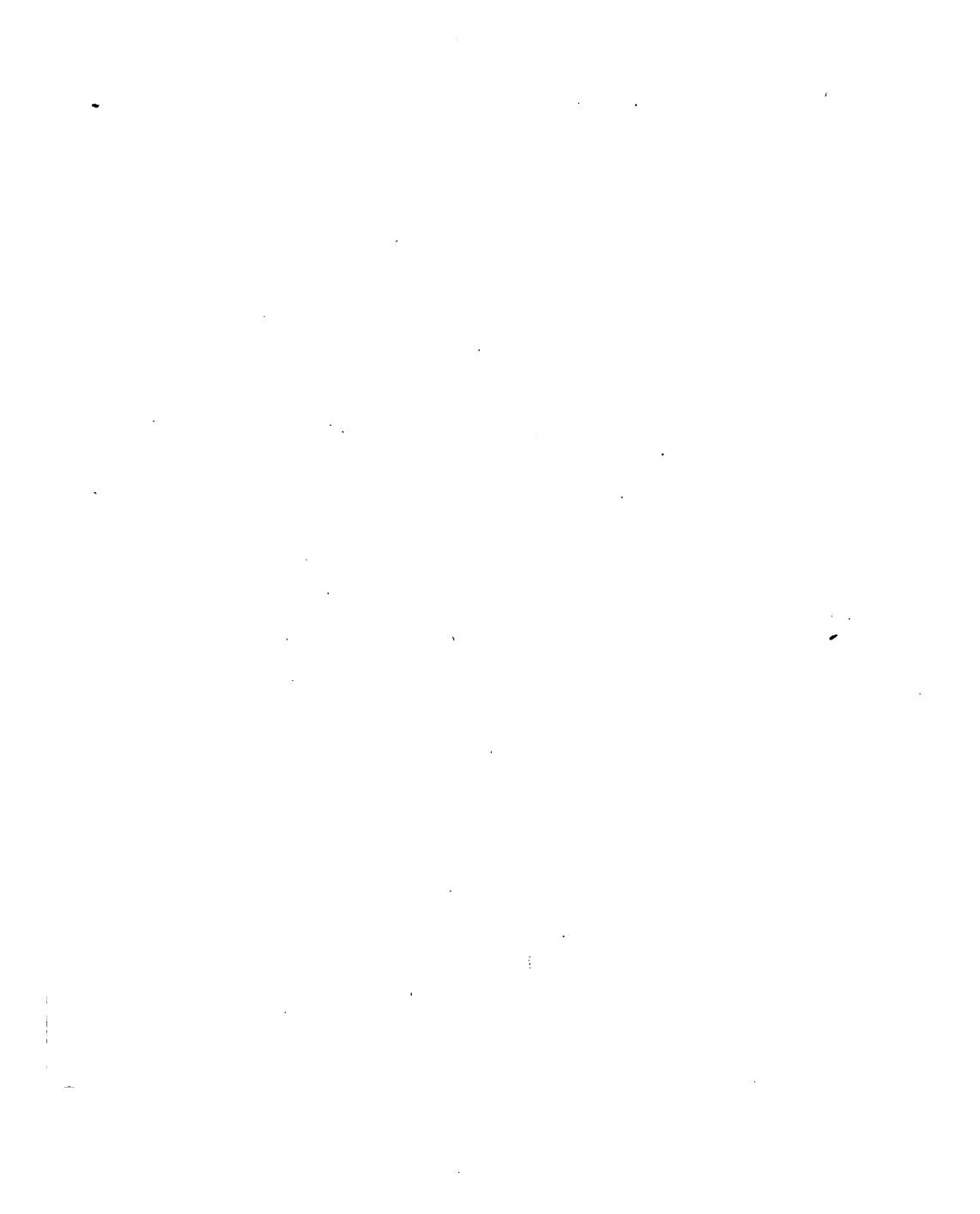
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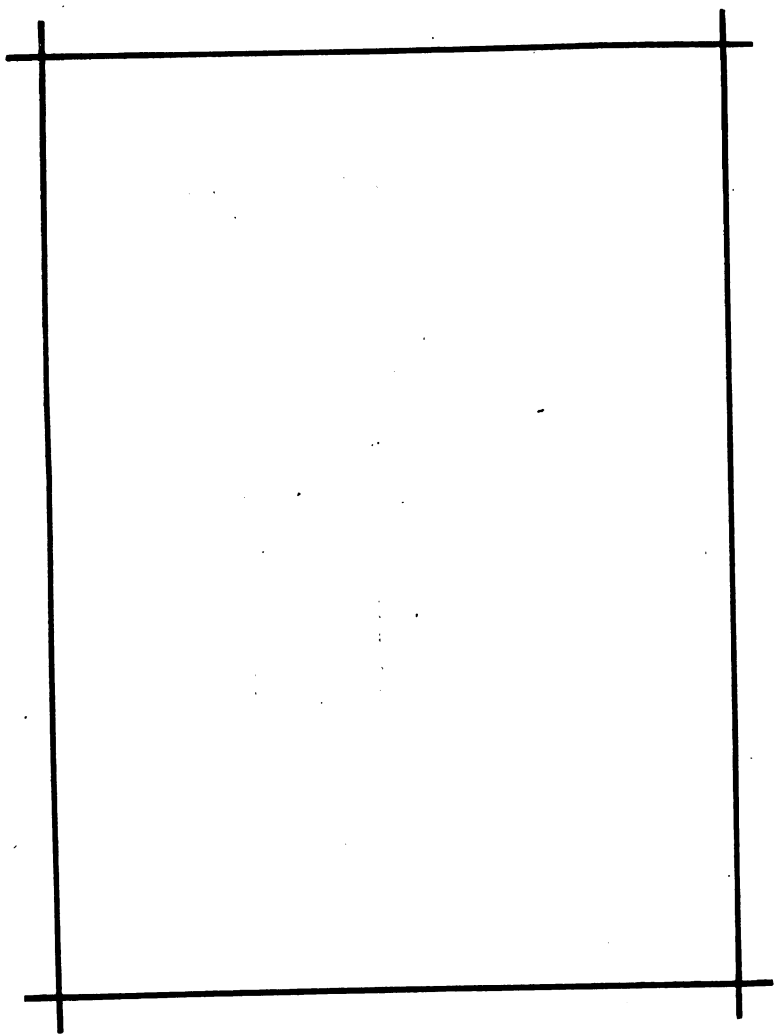




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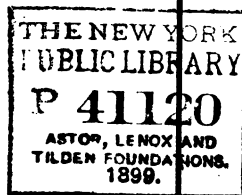
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MOTHERHOOD

A POEM



1008

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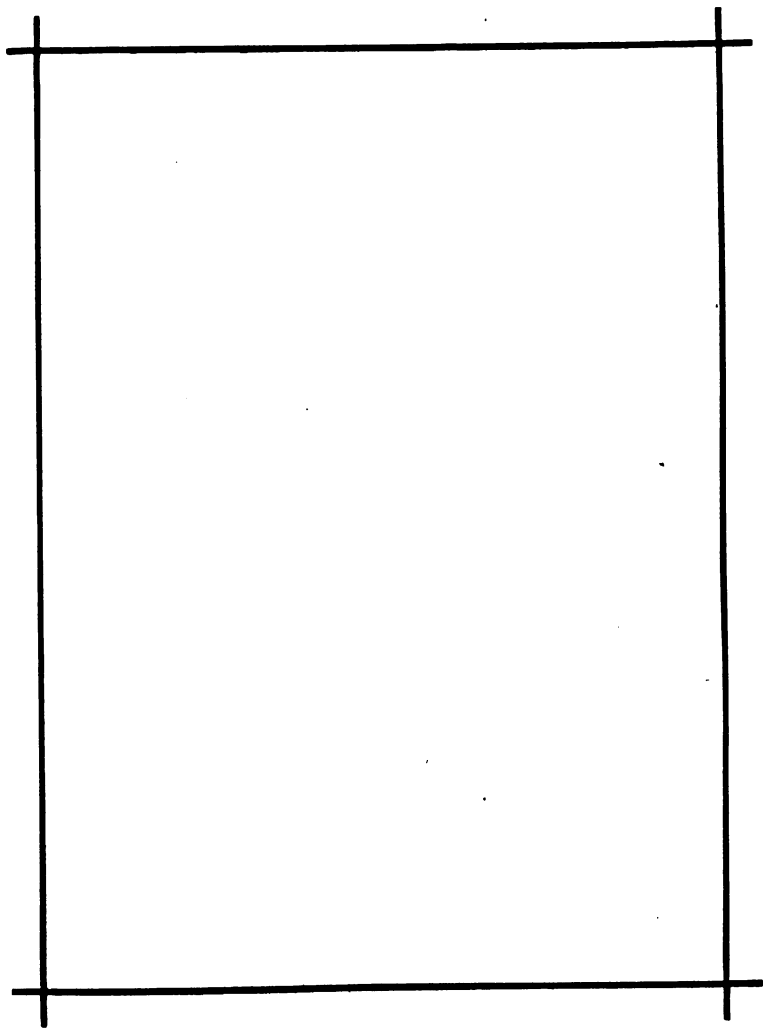
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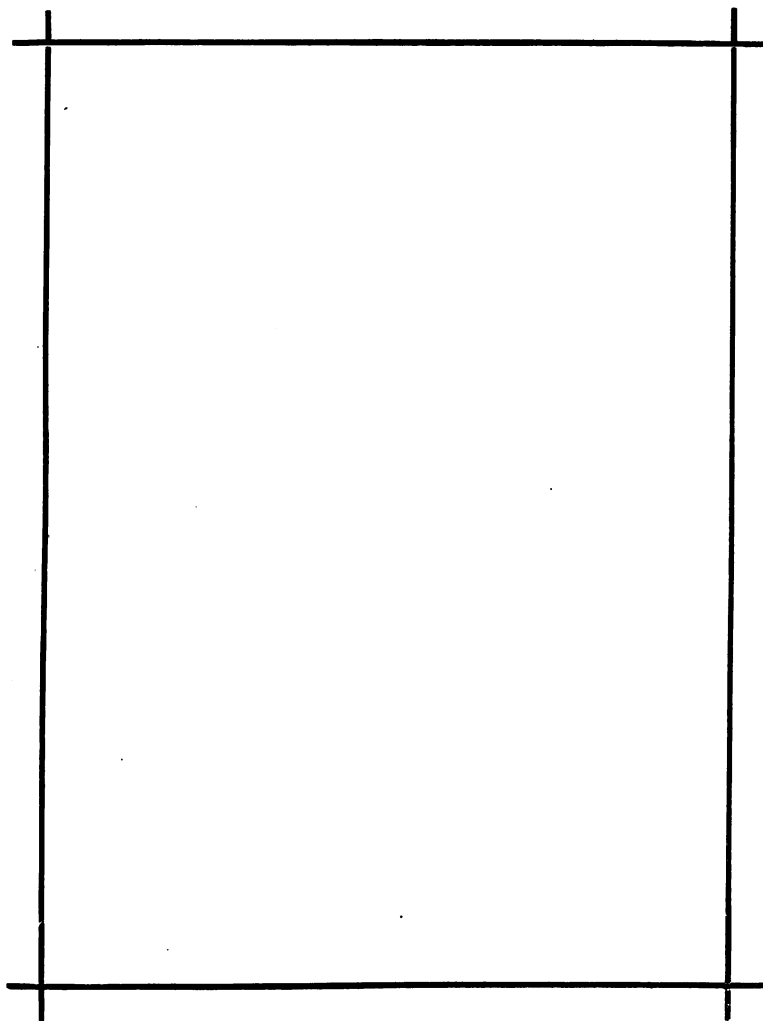
THE author hereby appeals to her readers and critics to respect the incognito of a poem which was written as an expression not of individual, but of universal experience, and from a desire to portray in its purity and holiness the most beautiful instinct of humanity.





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I.

The Hope.



MYSTERIOUS joy pervades me ; from
my pillow

I rise to look out on the starry night ;
And dreams float in upon its mystic billow
And yearnings infinite steal up the white
Star-rays on which I climb ecstatic height.

O miracle of night ! ye orbs of glory
Swinging along unseen meridian arc,
Hymning the anthem of life's wondrous story,
Voicing the sphered embrasure deep and dark,
Sing in your chorals till the heavens hark !

(5)

Beat in the rhythm of these starry measures,
My throbbing heart, and calm thy glowing
fire ;

Let bars celestial compass thy wild pleasures,
In peaceful selahs chant with holy choir,
Let reverent silence gird thy swift desire !



II.

The Prophecy.



HOW still and hushed are all God's
dwelling-places,

Yet full of meaning every stair and hall !
Pictures of imagery and gleaming faces
Start out from night's deep-vaulted gallery-
wall,
And unseen forms and silent voices call.

I answer low, responsive to your asking,
Bright visions, quiet voices, glances sweet :
Like sated honey bee at noon-tide basking
In blaze of blessing fall I at your feet,
O myriad spirits whom my soul doth greet !

Innumerable angels on swift pinions
Flying o'er earth and through the circling
sky,
Pure hosts, God's messengers in night's dominions,
Sing out my grateful joy or I shall die,
And I must live, so dear the prophecy.

For in the East a wonderful fair angel
Comes now toward my chamber lily-white ;
Her salutation like a glad evangel
Rings clear as bells of silver through the
night,
And on my forehead shines her halo bright.

III.

The "Hail Mary!"



GRAND white angel! in a sweet
surprise

I lift to thee my tear-suffusèd eyes.
Thou art so virgin-pure, thy starry zone
Girdles my room with lustre all thine own!
I kiss thy garment's hem, I dare not touch
Thy gentle hand outstretched, nor overmuch
Gaze on thy queenly stature in its grace,
Nor meet the recognition of thy face.
Hold out thy lily-sceptre, gracious one,
That I may feel thy blessed reign begun,

And while I breathe its incense, purify
Thy temple for this holy mystery!
Or who or what am I, that God has sent
His angel to my house, and for me meant
The very chrism of life, the seal of love,
The secret hope all other hopes above?



IV.

Hymn of Motherhood.



BEAUTIFUL new life within my
bosom,

New life, love-born, more beautiful than day,
I tremble in thy sacred presence, knowing
What holy miracle attends my way!
My heart is hushed, I hear between its beating
The angel of annunciation say,
“Hail, blessed among women!” while I pray.

O all-creative Love! thy finger touches
My leaping pulses to diviner heat.
What am I, that thy thought of life should
blossom

In me, in me thy tide of life should beat?
Beat strong within me God-tide, in high
passion,
With quickening spirit earth-born essence
greet!
Fountain of life! flow through me pure and
sweet.

O all sustaining Love! come close beside
me,—

Me, so unworthy of this wondrous gift.
Purge me, refine me, try me as by fire,
Whiten me white as snow in glacier-rift,
That neither spot, nor stain nor blemish
darken

These elements that now to being drift;
Inspire, sustain me, all my soul uplift!

O all-sufficient Love! I am as nothing ;
Take me, thy way, most facile to thy need ;
Enraptured, let me feel thy spirit moulding
The germ that thou hast made a living seed.
And while the currents of my life are speeding
This life immortal in its growth to feed,
To one dear purpose all my forces lead !



v.

Inheritance.



WITHIN my orchid-house I pace
To note the flowers' airy grace
And in each blossom see a face,

And in each golden bell a tongue
That sings to me how life is young,
And life to life is newly strung.

I wear the pearls were given me,
And give my pearls to destiny,
While pollen dusts the flower-bee.

For life is shed and life received,
Unconscious life in each conceived ;
The blossom dies, the fruit is sheaved.

Sweet orchid sprays like jewels lit,
In dazzling swarms they sway and flit,
Bright dreams and fancies infinite.

No clay nor mould for them was set,
No crude, base earths did them beget,
God smiled, and lo! their beauties met.

Finished by fine, aerial sprite
They quiver in the glowing light,
A miracle for wondering sight!

And wait for bird or bee to come
Among their bowers to dart and roam,
Then take the golden pollen home.

Ah! could my life without alloy
Bloom in its rich maternal joy
To bear my perfect girl or boy,

And angels plant the subtle germ
In essence pure and promise firm
To grow through nature's wonted term,

Then grace a universe of love
Untarnished, waving far above
The soil and mists in which I rove,

I'd yield my life an offering
That such a soul from mine should spring
Its glorious flight to plume and wing.



VI.

faith.



WHAT though my heart's darling
May ne'er see the day,
Was it but a stray starling
That flashed o'er my way?
I have loved, I was promised
Forever and aye.

I may weep for my nestling
So lost to my eyes,
But feel God's behest bring
A sweeter surprise.
Faith conquers doubt wrestling;
Love born never dies.

I can trust though He sever
In blindness and pain.
My child, we can never
Be parted again.
God's promises ever
Are yea and amen.



VII.

Crooning.



WHAT sunny hours bend low,
The while I sit and sew,
And with my needle in and out
Catch glimpses of sweet dreams about
The pretty things I work and weave,
Wee socks and dainty bib and sleeve,
For one I love,
My baby dear, my precious dove.

My baby has not breathed a breath,
It knoweth not or life or death,
But while I feel
Its little active limb and form

Within me all alive and warm,
Surety of life to me reveal,
 "O joy," I sing,
"For one I cover with my wing!"

 O sweet, rare joy!
 O lovely, fair employ!
The little garments smoothed and folded down,
Soft, brodered petticoat and plaited gown,
 The dainty press bursting its satin lid
 Like opening bud that can no more be hid,
My cradle garnished, let me sing and croon,
 For baby cometh soon,
 My hope's glad crown and boon!
Fly, little birds and sing it through the town!

VIII.

Resignation.



HATE'ER shall be, God willeth ;
My 'yearning heart He stilleth,
But satisfies and blesses
Its longing with caresses.
A throng of cherubim
And happy seraphim
Surround me as I wait
At birth's soft-sliding gate.
I dread not any tide
While God's good time I bide.
Even the mother-pain
Confronts me all in vain.
Blessing all cost above ;
Immortal fruit of love.

IX.

The Travail.



BIDE my time I say.

My soul still answers, "Aye,"

But my flesh is weak and trembles

At the coming agony.

In the fore-front of the battle

The soldier naught dissembles ;

Nor can I still my cry,

Which shall end in the death-rattle

Or the song of victory.

O God ! why do we go

To the gates of hell below,

By the rack and deathly travail

Through the anguish and the woe!

With pang on pang we wrestle

As though heart and flesh should cavil
And strain with blow on blow ;
As the mortar with the pestle
We shrink in nature's throe.

But my refuge is in God.
"Though He smite me with His rod,"
"He's my present help in trouble."
"Rivers shall not overflow,"
"When thou passest through the fire,"
"For thy shame thou shalt have double:"
Precious promises ! I know ;
In their strength I may aspire
Till my pulse swings steady, slow ,

And I meet the final strife
Soul-poised for death or life ;
To share in God's free passion

And suffer all for love ;
To joy in self-surrender
Till I thank Him for this fashion,
This way all ways above,
And my heart and life I tender
For my child, my heavenly dove.

Yet my senses swim and fade
For the life-blood is not stayed,
Soul and body wrench asunder,
Only this I understand :
While the life-lights dim and darken,
Blind with rapture and with wonder,
I receive from God's own hand
My own baby, while I hearken
To its cry upon life's strand.

x.

My Nursling.



ABY ánd I are alone,

Just baby and I !

His eyes look up and mine look down,

And the love that flashes in sympathy,

Is the gem in the crown.

His dimpled hand is at rest

Like a soft rose-leaf,

And cheek and lip lie on my breast

With pressure of trust, dear past belief ;

So true, so blest !

So close to my heart!
One clear life-tide
Coursing between ; my holy part
To feel the current warm from my side
At God's touch start ;
Then flush into rosy beams
From his glowing face,
Answering back in brighter gleams,
Springing up with a sweeter grace
Than my sweetest dreams !



The Death-Angel.



HE grey dawn faints to day,
As I hush my babe's low cry ;
Will the endless hours ne'er wear away ?
Slow fall the sands while I watch and pray,
For he breathes but with moan and sigh,
And I clasp him nearer in agony,
Dreading to see him die.

Who is it that crosses my way
As I pace the chamber-floor,
With gaze that follows me silently
And pleading arms where a mother might lay

Her darling to weep no more?
O woe! that I cannot say him nay
As he waits at my open door.

Sad angel of death, not yet!
My baby is mine. You see
He nestles so close and will not fret
Though his yearning eyes on mine are set,
And he tosses wearily.
O God! is it I who keep my pet
When Thou callest him unto Thee?

Break, selfish heart of mine!
It shall not hold him here.
My precious one, to those arms divine

Go freely, thy mother will resign
The treasure she holds most dear.
But, O Saviour of love, with healing sign
To my broken heart appear.



XII.

Consolation.



N smothered tones they said,
"The child must die."

I turned me from the bed
And bowed my bruised head,
Then with sharp pain I fled
His parting sigh.

My heart was rent in twain,
My soul forlorn,—
When bursting through the pain

Like heaven's blessed rain
This vision not in vain
To me was borne.

Celestial radiance streamed
From vista far.
Through shining ranks out-gleamed
Fond eyes that on me beamed,
Happy with God's redeemed,
As seraphs are.

I knew him for my own
In raiment bright.
His fleecy robe outshone
The light where he had flown :
His mother's love, outblown
In garment white !

So peaceful from that hour
I can abide ;
Content that love and power
Are his eternal dower,
And life's transcendent flower
Is glorified !



XIII.

The Greeting.



DEW, love-born soul !

Tell us what tender word thy brother
saith,

Learned since the angel-speech he uttereth.

Is it a sweeter sound than what should roll
Off little lipping lips when eyes beam up
To mother-eyes, and love o'erruns the cup ?

Fresh from that land

Where the child-angels stand

The clearest light and holiest place within,

Tell us of one so near to thee akin !

Clear baby-eyes, look with his glances sweet !
Dear baby-lips, his seraph words repeat !
Bring his caresses in thy rosy palm,
Touch all our grief with thy celestial balm !
O baby-heart ! answer thy mother's yearning,
Be to her joy and peace from heaven returning,
With thy soft grace this home illumine and bless,
We cannot love our darling there the less !



XIV.

The Lullaby.



N her pretty willow cradle softly sway-
ing,

Lulled to slumber by my tender rhythmic praying,
Lies my baby, while my mother heart is saying,
“God keep her there!”

Keep, O keep her sunny head upon its pillow,
Shining out between the twining withes of willow,
Rocking lightly as a bark on fairy billow,
“God keep her there!”

Breathing sweetly with a baby's soft pulsation,
To the measure of the cradle's light vibration,
In the cadence of my panting aspiration,
"God keep her there!"



xv.

The Nursery.



BRIGHT the sun looks in
And happy is the din ;
Gay clutter and uproar
Upon the nursery floor !
What truer ecstasy
Can life with all its pleasures offer me !

Cheery, yet peaceful too,
My nursery's pretty crew.
I clap my hands and smile,
They laugh and crow the while ;
I toss my bonny girl
Or lift with throb of pride each golden curl.

O, precious days of bliss !
Nothing so sweet as this
Can lighten up the life
Of true and happy wife.
I think of naught beside ;
There's nothing better though the world is wide.



XVI.

The Bath.



RING in the brimming bath,
Kindle the open hearth,
Drop down the garments white
And dip the fairy sprite.
The spray is dashing now
Over her sunny hair and beaming brow.

Dear little naiads, splash!
The shining waters dash,
With merry shout of joy,
Mamma's glad girl and boy;
Now wrapped in fleecy fold,
My fresh, sweet babies I may kiss and hold.

Out of my arms they run
To frolic in the sun.
What soft and agile grace,
Childhood's fair form and face!
Such contours Phidias saw,
Such colors only Raphael might draw



XVII.

Asleep.



W E go our happy round,

Papa and I.

Hush ! not a vagrant sound

Must wander by ;

In spell of slumber bound

The babies lie.

The golden curl is tossed

From sculptured brow ;

The parted lips have lost

Their prattle now,

Closed eye-lids, soft palms crossed,

Unconscious how.

How close the angels bend
Above their bed,
And heaven's bright halo lend
To crown their head !
O God ! Thy blessing send
Where seraphs tread !

And we, who trembling wait
With tear-swept cheek
At childhood's slumber-gate
In spirit meek,
Our Father supplicate,
His strength bespeak.



XVIII.

Mother and Child.



H ! the depth and tender sweetness
Of the wonderful Madonnas !

Love in its supreme completeness,
Child and mother crowned with honors !
Raphael Sanzio's holy faces,
Lighting Art's divinest places !

Rapt Murillo's vision painted
Baby regal, calm, pacific ;
Mother-brows all halo-sainted
Raised in rapture beatific ;
Grand Coreggio's revelation,
Motherhood's annunciation !

Galleries of all the masters
From the generations olden,
Safe from wreck of Time's disasters,
Fadeless in their glory golden,
Greet the child and mother kneeling
In our midst with love appealing.

While the Christmas shrine, unveiling
The immortal Babe and manger,
Witnesseth the love unfailing
Welcoming each heavenly stranger;
In each home the child and mother,—
Light of this world and the other.



7

Am





